

## Roundtable Discussion: Economic Impact on Women in Disaster Affected Areas in Australia

### Introduction

In 2012 two National Women's Alliances received Special Project Funds from the Office for Women to develop projects that focused on the economic impact on women in disaster affected areas in Australia. One condition of the funding was for those alliances to discuss their respective projects, identify opportunities for cooperation and collaboration and information sharing.

In 2013:

1. The National Rural Women's Coalition launched a kit titled "*Weather the Storm*" which is an engagement program which can be used by community groups to support women to prepare for emergencies and disasters. It comes in a presentation folder and consists of three manuals.

Part 1 – Program Manual. The kit is set out and designed so it can be delivered for communities groups. It can be used by anyone, however some skills or awareness of group facilitation would be useful. The kit gives a step-by-step guide to planning and delivering the program which can be adapted to fit communities and natural disaster types e.g. cyclones, bushfires etc. It follows a '*think and discover, plan, design, deliver and evaluate*' format. The content of the program is set out in a manner that is easy to follow e.g. how to set up, what to do as women arrive / work through session / end of sessions etc.

Part 2 – Tools and Templates has all the specific information, worksheets and tools needed to design a program. This includes sample invitation letters, worksheets, participation certificates, post program survey etc.

Part 3 - Resources has the resources which you can print and provide as handouts to participants or set up e.g. an emergency bushfire kit contents; how to use BOM information services.

The kit is available to download for free from the NRWC website.

<http://nrwc.com.au/Projects/WeatherTheStorm.aspx>

2. economic Security4Women launched “*Women’s voices from the floodplains*”, a report by JERA International, that focused an economic gender lens on responses in disaster affected areas in Queensland and Victoria (2011 floods). The anticipated outcomes of this project were for:
  - increased opportunities for women in disaster affected areas to provide their views on economic strategies to support women in disaster situations.
  - increased opportunities to inform policy debate and future economic strategies for disaster relief responses.
  - enhanced strategies to support women affected by natural disasters that take account of their economic security needs.

The report is available to download from the eS4W website

<http://www.security4women.org.au/past-projects/2013-projects/voices-from-the-flood-plains>

## **Roundtable discussion**

**In 2014, these alliances are planning to hold one roundtable discussion at Australia’s Parliament House in Canberra in 2013/14 and another in the first half of 2014/15 in one of the communities affected by disaster.**

The purpose of these discussions is to inform positions to be taken by the alliances in their engagement with government. These positions will be outlined in a report to government. A draft position paper based on the first roundtable will be finalised at the second.

The alliances have also invited the Australian Women’s Health Network to attend and present on their recent position paper “*The Impact on Women’s Health of Climatic and Economic Disaster*”.

The aim of the first policy roundtable is to ensure government and key stakeholders:

1. Are aware of the gendered nature of the impacts on women of emergencies and disasters.
2. Hear from women affected by disasters about enhanced ways to prepare for and respond to disasters to address these gendered impacts.
3. Are aware of the significant contributions women already make to the preparation for and management of emergencies and
4. More effectively take advantage of the resources women bring to these disaster situations.
5. Ensure women are equitably engaged in rebuilding and post disaster projects.

The aim of the second roundtable is to take the findings of the first to an affected community for discussion and review. The second roundtable would include local men as well as women and the agencies, who were involved in the disaster preparation and response.

We want to explore how the voices and strengths of women can be reflected in the relevant Commonwealth policies and programs:

## **Rationale**

Women often shoulder a disproportionate burden of the effects of disasters; as the primary family carer and as community carers they play a key unpaid role in community rebuilding.

However, the report for eS4W by JERA found that the needs of women are often overlooked in disaster affected areas. As a result, they have less opportunity than men to look for employment outside the disaster affected areas. This disruption to their economic activity impacts on local industries and economies.

Post-disaster, women often continue to bear a heavy workload including clean-up work, subsistence activities and care especially for children and the elderly.

They are often at the forefront of organising comfort, shelter, fuel, nutrition and water, as well as mobilising the community to respond to disaster.

In addition, there is evidence to suggest an increase in violence against women and children after such disasters.

As a result, women are not only left with virtually no time for income-generating activities, they also run the risk of being exhausted and overworked.

Despite this, gender concerns are often overlooked, ignored or dismissed as emergency responses take effect and the “tyranny of the urgent” (water in, water out, clean up, rebuilding of infrastructure, etc.) prevails.

On the positive side, women’s disaster response efforts can provide them with new skills they can carry over into the job market, giving them a unique opportunity to challenge and change their gendered status in society.

In contrast, when disasters hit overseas, international aid agencies often support development strategies that promote market-based opportunities for women, for example by strengthening women’s associations and advocating gender-sensitive business environment reform. There are also examples where women, despite gender-specific barriers, have established viable enterprises based on familial and community networks, e.g. in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, sometimes changing the gender relations in the family and community.

In Australia, however, these strategies are not employed and little is known about the specific economic impacts of disaster affected areas on women.

## Event Outline

### Breakfast Roundtable 2014

8am – 12pm Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> June at Australia's Parliament House

Time	Session	Content
7.45am	1	Registrations & Breakfast available
8.15	2	Welcome and introductions
8.30	3	Project key findings/recommendations <i>Weather The Storm: preparation</i> <i>From the floodplains: response and rebuild</i> <i>The Impact on Women's Health of Climatic and Economic Disaster</i>
9.10am	4	Questions (clarification)
9:20	5	Expert informants: Women's feedback on project findings
10am	6	Break
10:20am	7	Discussion  Outcome: With a focus on the gender lens, enhanced preparation and responses, informed by findings and experience
11:30am	8	Next steps
11:50am	9	Thank you and close

#### Discussion:

- 1 How is the economic impact on women accommodated in current approaches to disaster preparation, emergency management, disaster relief, recovery and mitigation policy and financial assistance and
- 2 How can a gendered approach make a difference?

#### For more information please contact

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